

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A vehicle comprising:
 - 5 an active network for communicating data between devices within the vehicle, a device disposed within the vehicle and having a vehicle related function, the device being coupled to the active network, and wherein the device includes a device network element forming a portion of the active network.
 - 10 2. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the device network element comprises a switch.
 - 15 3. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the device network element comprises a router.
 4. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the device network element comprises a bridge.
 - 20 5. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active network comprises a packet data network.
 6. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the device comprises a second device network element.
 - 25 7. The vehicle of claim 6, wherein the device network element and the second device network element are communicatively coupled.

8. The vehicle of claim 6, wherein the device network element is coupled to a first portion of the active network and the second device network element is coupled to a second portion of the active network.

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9. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the device includes a first functional element and a second functional element, and wherein the first functional element and the second functional element are coupled to the device network element.

10 10. The vehicle of claim 9, wherein the device network element comprises a first device network element and a second device network element, the first functional element being coupled to the first device network element and the second functional element being coupled to the second device network element.

15 11. The vehicle of claim 10, wherein the first device network element and the second device network element are communicatively coupled.

12. The vehicle of claim 1, wherein the active network comprises a plurality of active network elements coupled by connection media.

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13. In a vehicle comprising an active network for communications within the vehicle, the active network comprising a plurality of active network elements coupled by communication media, a method of coupling a device to the active network comprising:

5 providing within the device an device network element and coupling the device network element to the active network.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the step of coupling the device network element to the active network comprises coupling the device network element to one
10 of the active network elements of the plurality of active network elements.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the step of coupling the device network element to the active network comprises coupling the device network element to a first active element of the plurality of active network elements and to a second active
15 element of the plurality of active network elements.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the step of providing a device network element comprises providing a first device network element and a second device network element and wherein the step of coupling the device network element to the active network comprises coupling the first and second device network elements to the active network.
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17. The method of claim 16, wherein the step of coupling the first and second device network elements to the active network comprises coupling the first device

network element to a first active element of the active network and coupling the second device network element to a second active element of the active network.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein the step of coupling the first and second

5 device network elements to the active network comprises coupling the first and

second device network elements to a first active element of the active network and

coupling the first and second device network elements to a second active element of

the active network.

10 19. The method of claim 16, further comprising coupling the first and second

device network elements together.